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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 001107

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IT](#)
SUBJECT: NEXT STEPS IN ITALY'S CONTESTED ELECTION

REF: A. ROME 1034

[1](#)B. ROME 863

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Classified By: Political Minister Counselor David D. Pearce for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: In elections that showed Italy split down the political middle, center-left challenger Romano Prodi has apparently won a razor-thin majority over PM Silvio Berlusconi in the Italian Senate. His edge in the Chamber of Deputies was also close, but the voting bloc will be more substantial (340-277) because of an automatic majority premium that goes to the winning coalition. Prodi has claimed victory and vowed to form a government. But Berlusconi's Forza Italia party has formally requested a recount since Prodi earned his super-majority in the Chamber with a margin of only 25,000 votes of 38 million cast.

[1](#)2. (C) SUMMARY CONT: Italy's new parliament will hold its first session April 28 amid considerable political horse-trading. The first order of business for the new parliament will be election of chamber Presidents followed by a new President of the Republic. The new President of the Republic would then ask Prodi to form a new government, assuming a recount confirms his coalition's victory in the Chamber. Prodi's first major challenge would be to win a vote of confidence in both houses -- including the Senate where his coalition margin may hang on a single vote. END SUMMARY.

RAZOR-THIN RESULTS GIVE EDGE TO PRODI

[1](#)3. (U) Italians voted April 9-10 to elect new members for its Chamber of Deputies and Senate. Voter turnout was high (83.6 percent). After a night of back and forth results, final tallies for members of parliament show a slight edge for center-left (CL) challenger Romano Prodi over current PM Silvio Berlusconi's center-right (CR) coalition.

--The CL has won the Chamber of Deputies by a razor-thin 49.81 percent to 49.74 percent, a difference of less than 25,000 votes. In Italy's electoral system, this will give the CL a 340 to 277 seat advantage in the Chamber. Palazzo Chigi U/S Paolo Bonaiuti of Berlusconi's Forza Italia party has said the CR will likely contest the results of some districts. Twelve members of the Chamber will be elected in districts outside of Italy, but those results will not affect the majority.

--The CL also appears to have won the Senate, but the Senate's more complicated voting system means it will likely

have an ultra-thin majority. In domestic voting, the CR won 155 seats with 50.21 percent of the votes and the CL won 154 seats with 48.96 percent of the vote. However, the CL won 4 of 6 Senate seats elected abroad; the CR won one seat, and another is declared independent. This gives the CL a potential 158 to 156 majority. The Italian Senate also has seven Senators-for-life who favor the CL by 5 to 2, though they might chose to abstain from any vote of confidence for a new government.

CONFIRMING RESULTS

¶4. (U) The CR has announced its intention to contest the vote count in electoral districts with particularly tight results, given the slim 25,000 vote victory by the CL. The Ministry of Interior issued a press statement April 11 noting that electoral results announced by MoI are provisional and not official. The law gives the Central Constituency Offices of the Chamber and the Regional Electoral Offices of the Senate, both composed of magistrates, the power to define official data and decide on contested cases. Data verified in this way is transmitted to the Court of Cassation, which proclaims those elected. Validation of those elected is a right reserved to the Board of Elections of the Chamber and of the Senate, which would then pronounce definitively on any controversy or appeal.

¶5. (U) According to the MoI, in the Senate, there were 1,093,277 invalid votes, of which 488,403 were blank ballots, 39,822 contested ballots, and 565,052 ballots considered null (schede nulle); for the Chamber, there were 1,102,188 invalid votes, of which 448,002 were blank ballots, 43,028 were contested ballots, and 611,158 were ballots considered null. The number of invalid votes is low compared to past years, down about 60 percent in the Senate and 66 percent in the Chamber, presumably from 2001 levels.

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GOVERNMENT FORMATION NEXT STEPS

¶6. (SBU) The newly elected Italian parliament will sit April 28 to elect Presidents of both chambers. Within a few days, the chambers, in a joint session with additional regional representatives, must elect a new President of the Republic. The new President of the Republic, after consulting with appropriate political and social leaders, will likely ask the leader of the largest coalition in the Chamber of Deputies to form a new government (REF A). Assuming a potential recount confirms present results, that means Prodi would be asked to form the next government. Prodi has already claimed victory, despite the close and contested outcome, and vowed to form the next government. "There is no other option," he told reporters.

¶7. (SBU) After assembling his cabinet and receiving the blessing for his proposed government list from the President of the Republic, a potential Prodi-led government would have to win a vote of confidence separately in the Chamber of Deputies and in the Senate. Assuming current results withstand a recount in the Chamber, a positive vote in the Chamber seems very likely. The CL's slim Senate majority, however, could hinge on as little as a single vote and this will make the Senate confidence vote a difficult fight. A senior Forza Italia official confided to Ambassador that he thought a Center Left government could get started in these circumstances, but it was far from certain how long it could last.

BACK-ROOM POLITICKING

¶8. (C) More than 200 members of the current Italian

parliament have switched parties during the previous legislative period. The senior Forza Italia official said that the CR is working hard to maintain coalition unity. However, he admitted it was possible that some centrist Senators could jump to the CL in exchange for additional political influence.

¶9. (U) Prodi has declared himself confident that he will be able to form a stable government. PM Berlusconi has not conceded defeat publicly, and has stated that strong results for his Forza Italia party are a vindication for how he has governed.

READING TEA LEAVES

¶10. (C) The CL seems to have eked out a slim victory over the CR, but there are also winners and losers within each of the coalitions. At first glance, having won 24 percent of the vote in the Senate, FI did much better than expected, even that marks a decline from 29 percent in 2001. FM Fini's Alleanza Nazionale hung even at 12.4 percent while Pier Ferdinando Casini's centrist UDC party increased its percentage from 3.2 to 6.8 percent in the Senate, making Casini a rising star in Italian politics.

¶11. (C) As noted REF B, a weak CL victory will likely produce a weak Prodi government, especially if the far-left is essential to a viable governing coalition. The Democrats of the Left (DS) are the traditional base of the CL, and the DS failed to realize its hopes of displacing Forza Italia as the country's single largest party. In the Senate, it registered 17.5 percent, up less than one percentage point from 16.6 percent in 2001. But the far-left parties fared better. The Communist Renewal (RC) Party won 7.4 percent and the combined Greens and Italian Communist Party (PdCI) won 4.2 percent. In terms of Senate seats, the far-left parties have captured 38 of the CL's 158 seats, making them essential for a stable majority. This will make it more difficult for CL moderates to steer a responsible foreign policy.

COMMENT

¶12. (C) Government formation could take some time. It looks like Prodi will get first crack at forming a government, but he will do so from a relatively weak position. The outlook is thus for an arduous government formation process and a government that could well be wobbly from the start. END
COMMENT
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